



U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry

## **Cabo Rojo Ground Water Contamination Site Draft Public Health Assessment Summary**

Public Comment Release – October 21, 2011 – Cabo Rojo, Puerto Rico

**Public Comment Period Closes January 20, 2012**

### **What is ATSDR?**

ATSDR stands for the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry. We are a federal public health agency, part of the Department of Health and Human Services. ATSDR's mission is to serve the public through responsive public health actions to promote healthy and safe environments and prevent harmful exposures.

### **Background**

- Man-made chemicals called chlorinated volatile organic compounds (VOCs) have been found at low levels in municipal drinking water supply wells in Cabo Rojo. The Puerto Rico Aqueduct and Sewer Authority (PRASA) continues to monitor the wells.
- So far, the source of the contamination has not been identified. To more effectively investigate and clean up the site, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has added the Cabo Rojo Ground Water Contamination site to the National Priorities List (NPL, or "Superfund") of contaminated sites.

### **ATSDR's Involvement**

- ATSDR is required by Congress to conduct public health activities on all sites proposed for the NPL. The purpose of this Public Health Assessment (PHA) is to determine whether the community is, has been, or could be harmed by exposure to VOCs in municipal water and what public health actions need to be taken to reduce harmful exposures.
- Because of limited available data, ATSDR focused its evaluation on exposure to VOCs in municipal well water. Other potential exposure pathways may be evaluated as more data are collected from the site.

### **Why is there a concern about VOCs in well water?**

VOCs from the well water might enter the bodies of people who drink the water, breathe in droplets of water, breathe in VOCs that evaporated from the water, or get the water on their skin. VOCs that get into people's bodies might cause harmful effects. Whether the VOCs cause harmful effects depends on the concentration of VOCs in the water and how often and for how long people use the water.





U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry

## **Cabo Rojo Ground Water Contamination Site** *(continued from front)*

### **ATSDR's Draft Findings**

- Current exposures to VOCs in municipal water from the Cabo Rojo system are not likely to harm people's health. None of the public supply wells have exceeded federal drinking water standards for the VOCs detected.
- The data reviewed (from within the past 10 years) indicate that past exposures to VOCs in municipal water were not likely to harm people's health. We do not have enough information to make definite conclusions about earlier exposures.
- Because the source and extent of the contamination have not been identified, exposures to VOCs in municipal water could potentially harm public health in the future.
- More information is needed to assess potential exposure pathways including private wells, vapor intrusion (movement of VOCs from groundwater through soil and into homes), and exposure near source areas.

### **ATSDR's Recommendations**

- PRASA should continue frequent monitoring of the wells' water quality to ensure that the public water supply meets federal standards.
- EPA should continue its efforts to identify the source of the VOC contamination, characterize the extent of the contamination, and take actions to address and prevent groundwater contamination.

ATSDR will evaluate additional data collected by EPA and update the findings of this PHA, if necessary.

### **How to Review and Comment on ATSDR's Draft Findings**

The ATSDR report on the Cabo Rojo Ground Water Contamination site is available for review at <http://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/HAC/PHA/HCPHA.asp?State=PR>. A copy of the report has also been placed at the Biblioteca Blanca E. Colberg Rodríguez, Calle Ruíz Belvis # 48 in Cabo Rojo.

Your comments will improve the quality of the report. Send comments **by January 20, 2012** to [ATSDRRecordsCenter@cdc.gov](mailto:ATSDRRecordsCenter@cdc.gov), or mail to:

ATSDR Records Center Attn: Rolanda Morrison  
RE: Cabo Rojo Ground Water Contamination NPL Site, Cabo Rojo, PR  
1600 Clifton Road, NE (MS F-09)  
Atlanta, Georgia 30333

Comments received during the public comment period, without the names of who submitted them, and ATSDR responses will appear in an appendix to the final PHA. Names of those who



U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry

submit comments, however, will be subject to release for requests made under the U.S. Freedom of Information Act.